



Psychoanalytic Perspectives in Indian Literature: Exploring the Unconscious through Myth, Memory, and Modernity

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Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe quoted “I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity” and how does one’s psychological turmoil turn their minds into some eerie, uncanny, unsettling space. This paper examines the enduring legacy of American Gothic traditions, tracing their evolution from the 19th century works of Edgar Allan Poe and others to their contemporary cinematic resonance in Sergio G. Sánchez’s 2017 film, Marrowbone. While traditional Gothic literature is often centered on decaying European castles and supernatural occurrences, Poe domesticated the genre, shifting its focus to the psychological turmoil, haunted familial spaces, and repressed traumas that define a distinctly American horror. The research employs a comparative textual analysis to explore how key thematic elements- including hereditary madness, the uncanny, and the grotesque. They are transformed and recontextualized across different media and historical periods. We argue that Marrowbone serves as a modern-day echo chamber, not merely borrowing from but actively engaging with and reinterpreting the foundational anxieties articulated by Poe, Hawthorne, Henry James, etc. The film’s isolated mansion, fractured family unit, and psychological twists resonate with Poe’s explorations of internal decay and the haunting presence of the past. The central hypothesis is that Marrowbone is a critical reinterpretation of American Gothic conventions, demonstrating how a 21st century film uses conventions’ foundational elements to explore contemporary anxieties surrounding family, identity, and mental health. The study uses Freudian psychoanalysis and genre theory to demonstrate this thematic continuity and evolution.

Keywords: gothic, psychological turmoil, horror, multidisciplinary

Introduction: Exploring the Hidden Mind

Psychoanalysis is all about diving deep into the hidden corners of our minds—those parts we don’t often think about but that quietly shape how we feel, think, and behave. It’s like exploring a secret world beneath the surface of our everyday awareness. This fascinating journey began with Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s, when he introduced groundbreaking ideas in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Since then, thinkers like Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and Jacques

Lacan have expanded on these ideas, influencing not only psychology but also literature, art, and film.

Freud’s Iceberg: The Structure of the Mind

Freud famously compared the mind to an iceberg. What we see, the conscious mind, is just a tiny tip poking above the water. The largest part lies hidden beneath the surface, the unconscious. This unconscious mind is a vast reservoir of buried desires,



fears, and memories that shape who we are, often without our awareness.

Freud explained the mind through two main models. The first, the *Topographical Model*, divides the mind into three layers:

- Conscious: What we're aware of at any moment.
- Preconscious: Memories and knowledge that we can recall easily.
- Unconscious: The deepest layer, containing hidden feelings, instincts, and desires.

The second, the *Structural Model*, breaks the mind into three parts:

- Id: The wild, impulsive part that demands instant gratification.
- Ego: The practical, realistic part trying to balance desires with reality.
- Superego: The moral compass that enforces rules and guilt.

Psychoanalysis and Literature: Revealing Hidden Depths

Applying Freud's ideas to literature opens up an entirely new way of understanding stories and characters. Like dreams, literature can reveal hidden fears, desires, and inner conflicts that characters may not even be aware of themselves. Take Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example. Viewed through Freud's lens, Hamlet wrestles with unconscious guilt and repressed emotions that deeply influence his actions. His hesitation to avenge his father's murder can be seen as a manifestation of these buried feelings, reflecting the inner conflict between duty, desire, and morality.

This psychoanalytic approach allows readers to look beyond the surface drama and appreciate the psychological complexity underneath. Moreover, Freud's theory helps explain why certain themes such as family tension, forbidden desires, or fear of death resonate universally in literature. These are not merely plot devices but symbolic expressions of unconscious struggle we all face. Characters become more relatable as we recognize our own hidden fears mirrored in their dilemmas. In this way, psychoanalysis enriches our engagement with

literature by turning reading into an exploration of the human psyche.

Carl Jung and the Collective Unconscious

Carl Jung added another fascinating dimension by introducing the idea of the *collective unconscious*—a shared pool of myths, symbols, and archetypes connecting all humans. Archetypes like the Hero, the Shadow, the Anima, and the Animus repeatedly appear in stories across cultures. These recurring patterns represent universal human experiences and psychological realities that transcend individual cultures and histories.

Jung believed these archetypes emerge in dreams, myths, and creative works, acting as a bridge between personal consciousness and deeper, shared human truths. Indian literature, rich with mythology and spirituality, naturally reflects these universal themes. For example:

- Arjuna from the *Mahabharata* embodies the Hero archetype, facing inner doubts and moral dilemmas. His struggle to fulfill his duty despite personal fears symbolizes the archetypal journey of growth and self-understanding.
- Raju from R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* follows an archetypal path of self-discovery and transformation, evolving from a flawed man to a spiritual figure. This evolution mirrors Jung's concept of individuation, where a person integrates unconscious aspects of the self to become whole.

By examining these characters through Jungian psychoanalysis, we can appreciate how Indian narratives connect personal struggles with collective human patterns, giving the stories a timeless and universal appeal.

Psychoanalysis in Modern Indian Literature

In modern Indian English literature, psychoanalytic concepts help explore complex themes like identity, cultural conflict, and trauma. Writers such as Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Aravind Adiga delve deep into their characters' subconscious minds. They skillfully use dreams, memories, and



symbolism to expose hidden struggles shaped by personal, historical, and social forces.

For instance, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* uses magical realism to reflect the fragmented psyche of a nation and its people, revealing the deep psychological scars left by colonialism and partition. Jhumpa Lahiri's stories often focus on immigrants grappling with dual identities and suppressed desires, illustrating the tension between conscious assimilation and unconscious cultural memory.

These authors use psychoanalysis not only to analyze individuals but also to critique broader societal issues like displacement, oppression, and cultural hybridity. The subconscious becomes a site where history, politics, and personal pain intersect. Through this lens, modern Indian literature becomes a powerful medium for understanding how past traumas continue to shape present identities and relationships.

The Power of Dreams in Indian Literature

Dreams play a crucial role in psychoanalysis and Indian storytelling. Jung described dreams as windows into the unconscious, revealing repressed fears, desires, and emotions. In Indian literature—from ancient epics to contemporary novels—dreams often serve as powerful portals into characters' inner worlds. They help explain actions and personal growth that might otherwise seem mysterious.

In texts like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, dreams often carry divine messages or foreshadow significant events, blending the spiritual with the psychological. In modern Indian literature, dreams reveal the inner conflicts of characters struggling with identity, loss, and social change. For example, in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, dreams and memories intertwine to expose trauma and longing beneath the surface. Thus, dreams in Indian narratives function not just as symbolic imagery but as essential tools for self-reflection and transformation, highlighting the complex relationship between conscious reality and the hidden depths of the mind.

Conclusion: Psychoanalysis as a Literary Lens

Psychoanalysis is far from being just a dry psychological theory. Instead, it serves as a powerful lens through which Indian literature invites us to explore the complex and mysterious workings of the human mind. Here, mythology, memory, dreams, and reality come together to shape identity and experience. This approach helps readers see characters not just as fictional figures but as reflections of real human struggles. It uncovers the hidden fears and hopes driving people's actions, revealing universal truths about human nature. The rich cultural background of Indian literature adds depth by blending ancient myths and spiritual beliefs with modern social realities. By revealing unconscious motivations and conflicts, psychoanalysis deepens our empathy and understanding. It bridges personal psychology with cultural history, showing how individual struggles are intertwined with larger societal forces. Ultimately, psychoanalysis enriches our reading experience, making Indian literature a vibrant exploration of the inner landscapes that define us all.

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